the village VOICE December 8, 1975

JFK ASSASSINATION PROBE

CBS Leaves a Skeptic Skeptical

BY DICK RUSSELL

It was a classic case of guilt by omission. Or, at best, an exercise in "benign neglect." Last week's CBS Reports Inquiry into the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the result of a supposedly exhaustive six-month study, promised a scapel's probe and delivered two hours of mascara.

CBS finally let itself off the hook by joining the chorus of calls for a new investigation by Congress. But its first program was a kind of Ode to Expertise, a parade of scientists behind charts and microscopes, an attempt to pronounce the last word on Oswald-as-lone-gunman. Consider, however, what CBS failed to mention about its team of specialists:

●Itek, a photo-analysis corporation hired to examine the frames of the original Zapruder film, is a Rockefeller company that gets 60 per cent of its contracts from the government. According to Maurice Schonfeld, former managing editor of UPI Films writing in the Columbia Journalism Review, Itek's knowledge about things like development of bomb sights is sought mainly by the military and the CIA. Itek's Chairman of the Board, Franklin A. Lindsay, was once named by Soviet spy Kim Philby as a CIA plotter. (Lindsay said yesterday he has never confirmed or denied this.) Lindsay's assistant, Howard Sprague, writes Schonfeld, has also been a CIA employee. And this CBS study was Itek's third purporting to show no photorgraphic evidence of conspiracy in the JFK assassination. The others were for UPI and Life magazine.

●Dr. James Weston, the president-elect of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences asked by CBS to analyze Kennedy's wounds, is the *only* recent Academy president still satisfied with the original Warren Commission conclusions about two shots striking from the rear. Outgoing Academy president Robert Joling, as well as four other past presidents, have called for a review of all medical and scientific evidence by a new independent panel of forensic experts.

●Dr. Alfred G. Olivier, called on by CBS to uphold the controversial belief that a single bullet could emerge so unscathed after hitting both Kennedy and John Connally, is a *veterinarian* at Edgewood Arsenal. His lone approving voice has been called gospel by the Warren Commission, Rockefeller Commission on CIA activities, and now CBS.

As for the critics whose evidence might indicate more than one assassin, CBS gave them short shrift. Despite a total of six hours of interviews with photo researcher Josiah Thompson and former Academy president Dr. Cyril Wecht, the strongest conclusions of both men wound up on the cutting room floor.

Here is what a truly open CBS inquiry might have said about the main bones of contention:

Oswald's Marksmanship: If a man could fire three shots from a clumsy, single-shot Mannlicher-Carcano rifle like Oswald's in 5.2 seconds—the time CBS calculated between the first and fatal shots on the Zapruder film—then Oswald could indeed have been the only gunman. So CBS set up a simulated situation with a moving target, and four marksmen did achieve what many critics had long contended was impossible. But CBS said nothing about the results of its other seven marksmen, and gave no indication of cumulative scores or number of practice rounds.

Another question about the law of probability focuses on just when the first shot may have struck Kennedy. The Zapruder film doesn't tell, because 15 frames (slightly less than a second) are obscured by the limousine's passage behind the Stemmons Freeway sign. If Kennedy was hit just before emerging again into Zapruder's lens, the likelihood of Oswald's hitting his target is even more suspect, since CBS starts its 5.2 second computation much earlier. CBS didn't bother raising that issue.

The single bullet theory: The Warren Commission's contention of three shots, one of which struck the curb, depends totally on the first shot passing through both Kennedy and John Connally. If Kennedy and Connally were hit by separate bullets, that means there were *four* shots altogether—one too many for a single marksman to get off in 5.2 seconds. But is it possible for a single bullet to hop, skip, and jump into seven different angle wounds in the two men?

CBS refuted the doubters on this issue by claiming it was impossible to tell precisely how Kennedy and Connally were sitting when struck. This time, the network chose to *use* the temporary obstruction of the freeway sign in the Zapruder film to make its point. If the men changed position in that time frame, CBS said, the strange trajectory could well have occurred. Had CBS consulted available films taken from other angles, it would have been obvious that neither man moved enough in that less-than-a-second interval to allow the otherwise impossible flight of the so-called "magic bullet."

The program's experts also maintained that a slight visible movement on Connally's part right after Kennedy is hit indicates that the same bullet is striking *him*. Josiah Thompson and Dr. Wecht painstakingly showed CBS how, more than a second later in the Zapruder frames, Connally *clearly* reacts—his right shoulder collapsing, cheeks puffing, hair dislodged. Connally's own doctor believes *that* is the momentum of a bullet hitting him, while the earlier movement is a startled reaction to *hearing* a shot hit Kennedy. Connally agrees. In fact, he told that to CBS in an earlier interview where he also stated his feeling that all the shots did come from the rear. CBS chose to use the latter segment but eliminated Connally's remarks about different bullets.

CBS also eliminated Dr. Wecht's discussion of the implausibility of the single bullet's remarkably

pristine condition, if indeed it could do what the Warren Commission claimed. That bullet, as CBS showed, is scarcely damaged by all its travels. Not one scientist has ever come up with a bullet in such good condition in simulated experiments with cadavers. Yet CBS took the word of veterinarian Oliver that it *could* happen, and ignored Wecht's telling words.

The fatal shot: The strongest argument for conspiracy in the Zapruder film is also the hardest to watch. It clearly shows the top of the president's head being blown off, and the force catapulting him backward and to the left. That final impact obviously came from somewhere in *front* and to the *right* of the president—somewhere along the area known as the grassy knoll.

Yet Itek's image enhancement technique claims to show a perceptible forward movement of Kennedy's head *before* the backward "reaction" sets in. If so, it was invisible in CBS's rendering. CBS backed this with the hypothesis that Jacqueline Kennedy may have inadvertently pushed her husband backward. This is preposterous, since the film shows no real reaction on Mrs. Kennedy's part until 10 frames *after* the fatal shot.

For further evidence, Dan Rather asserted that the greater portion of the president's brain matter flew forward, indicating once again a shot from the rear. This statement is contradicted by almost every witness in the motorcade. Both policemen riding *behind* the limousine were splattered, one so hard he thought he'd been shot, and two skull fragments also went flying backwards. In front of the president there was only slight falling debris.

On CBS, the Zapruder film was never shown all the way through at speed, nor was much of the other vast photographic evidence examined in detail. There was no mention of something Itek acknowledge in its earlier work for Life magazine—a strange figure visible in other films, standing at the base of the retaining wall perpendicular to the fateful Elm Street.

Nor was there mention of new technological tools like the Psychological Stress Evaluator (PSE), which concluded from voice tapes of Oswald after the shooting that he was telling the truth about not shooting anybody in Dallas. And no mention of the possibility that Oswald was framed, although considerable speculation exists whether the window boxes and spent cartridges were arranged *later* on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

The second program, which dealt with Oswald's relationships with the FBI and CIA and the chance of conspiracy, was better—as far as it went. But Jack Ruby, Oswald's slayer, was left out entirely. No discussions of Ruby's previous connections with the mob, FBI, Dallas police, Castro's Cuba, possibly even Oswald himself—despite two months of CBS research last spring for a "60 Minutes" segment titled "The Oswald-Ruby Connection." That program was canceled when the fall specials were announced, its research supposedly turned over to the new production unit.

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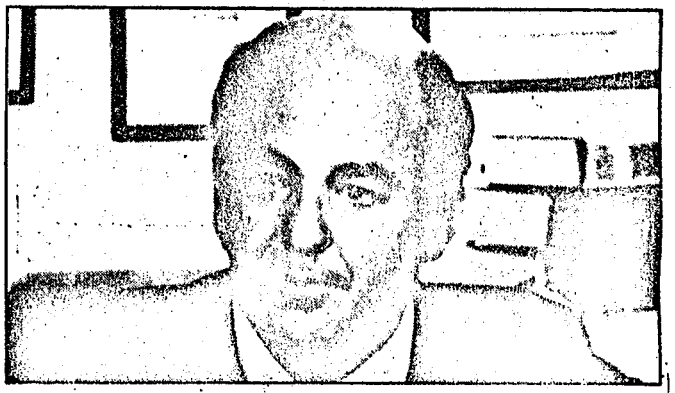
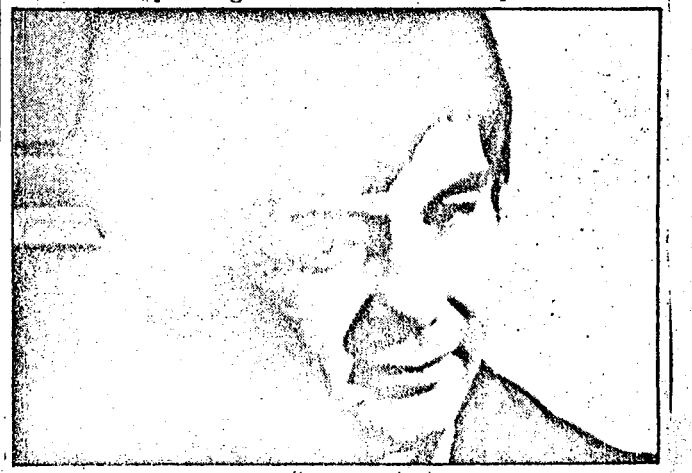
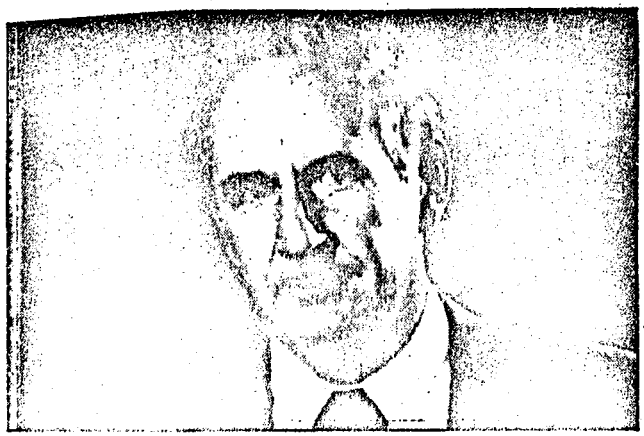
Dan Rather, narrator: not a probe but two hours of mascara



Cyril Wecht, pathologist: " heart cut out of his presentation"



Josiah Thompson, author: "conclusions on cutting room floor"



James Weston, scientist: His colleagues disagree with him.

There are countless smaller points. Why, in interviewing ex-CIA official Victor Marchetti, didn't CBS ask abut the meeting he attended in 1968 with then-director Richard Helms? At the height of Jim Garrison's conspiracy investigation in New Orleans, Marchetti has Helms conceding that Garrison's two principal figures—accused conspirators Clay Shaw and David Ferrie—were indeed once CIA contact employees. The Garrison probe wasn't mentioned once by CBS.

How does this happen? Why should CBS blatantly ignore so much crucial evidence and uphold the government-appointed Warren Commission? Can this be another example of the kind of Byzantine media-government relationship Variety suggests in its latest issue in which it alleged an offer of favored treatment from former CBS president Frank Stanton to the Nixon White House in exchange for help in a lawsuit against the CBS documentary "Selling of the Pentagon?" (Stanton has denied initiating the 1971 meeting.)

Perhaps not. But, curiously, these current CBS programs are almost identical—in score and cast—to the network's first series of specials eight years ago. It's basically the same production staff and commentator coming to the same conclusions. Back in 1967, up until the last minute most of the producers anticipated a script raising grave doubts about whether Oswald acted alone. Then, abruptly, something changed. CBS backed the Warren Commission right down the line, and one producer, Bob Richter, was so astounded that he resigned.

Richter, who now has his own documentary production company, says of the latest CBS effort: "It seemed a form of unusual advocacy journalism, especially the first program. I'd say they almost seemed to be defensive. They should have said, here's the evidence and here's what the experts say—experts who disagree. A third conclusion ought to have been considered for the evidence: Not proven."

Both Dr. Wecht and Thompson privately wonder if the script didn't again undergo last-minute editing from CBS higher-ups. After calling him twice to go over word for word what Rather would say about Wecht's statements, Wecht says CBS then "cut the heart of my presentation."

The November 24 issue of Time magazine also devoted five pages to "Who Killed J.F.K.? Just One Assassin." The article, of course, didn't touch on Time-Life's long suppression of the original Zapruder film vaults. Nor did it mention former editor Richard Billings who, like Richter at CBS, resigned in outrage in 1968 when life thwarted the investigation they'd assigned him.

According to photo research expert Richard Sprague, who was gathering material for Billings, the Life team was suddenly ordered to stop all work on the JFK assassination. "All of the research files, including the Zapruder film and slides and thousands of other film frames and photographs, were locked up tight," Sprague has written. "No one at the magazine was permitted access to these materials and no one outside was ever allowed to see them again."

As Life eventually did with the Zapruder film, CBS made a big deal about showing the intervie in which LBJ expressed his own doubts about the Kennedy case. Although segments were originally kept off the air at LBJ's request, their content had long since been widely reported. So in the main had CBS's look at intelligence ties. But the one startling revelation—an interview with Robert McKeown about Oswald's approaching him to buy *four* highpowered rifles—wasn't purpused very far. Nor were other men besides McKeown with equally important tales, whom CBS made no effort to track down.

The strongest insight came from the films of Lee Harvey Oswald himself. In the midst of chaos at police headquarters, he possessed an almost uncanny calm, as if certain that this rather bizarre circumstance would soon be cleared up and the truth made known. And from the old footage of Oswald's days in New Orleans, the distinct feeling remains that his espousing the Marxist cause has a motive behind it, that he wasn't speaking for himself but for someone else.

The question that must yet be answered is—who? □

For a different view, see Eliot Fremont-Smith's article, p. 57.